

Gloria knelt by her, begging her not to cry. At last she offered the final bribe in her power. She drew the envelope of letters from the bosom of her gown and held it out to Lois, saying:

"I forgive you, dear. I have no right to judge you. I can't take that responsibility. Keep your life and your past and make what you will of them."

Lois rather saw the prize than heard the counsel and she snatched at the letters with the instinct of a child.

Gloria felt her heart harden again. She could not keep back a feeling of contempt for the selfish pettiness of Lois.

Gloria was afraid to speak lest she waste further rebukes on a soul that could not profit by any other chastisement than sacrifice and fear. So Gloria left her and climbed the terraces. She noted with relief that no one had seen the brief drama that might have startled the whole nation. She was afraid that she had done everything she ought not to have done.

As she was entering the house to go to her room the boy Stas called her. He was holding a picture book of foreign paintings. He knew nothing of any of them and he asked Gloria many questions she could not answer. One of the pictures represented Christ kneeling and writing on the ground. Near him lay a contrite woman in shame and tears. In the background a number of men were turning away shamefaced. The picture was labeled, "Neither Do I Condemn Thee, Go and Sin No More."

Now, Gloria felt that she was justified in laying aside her impulse to exact a penalty from Lois. She told Stas that the picture was beyond the understanding of a child, and that he was lucky to be a child. She wished that she had never grown up. Then she went to her room. Looking from her window, she could see the embankment where she had won a double victory over Lois and herself. Lois was tearing the bundle of letters to bits and scattering the pieces upon the railroad track, where she had nearly been torn to pieces herself.

Gloria felt that one riddle at least was solved. She felt sorry for David and his choice among women. Then she remembered the judge's accusation against David. According to that her brother was guilty of a more heinous crime than Lois. He had taken a life or, with even greater wickedness, had persuaded another man to commit murder for him. She could not rest till she had either cleared David of that suspicion or warned him that his secret was known.

The reason that the duel between Gloria and Lois had not been observed by anyone but the fleeting eyes of the fireman on the express engine was that the Stafford estate was a little world in itself.

David had been conferring with his business associates by telephone. Pierpont had been inspecting the prize cattle with which he jealously expected to confound his rival neighbors at the next county fair. Stas had been looking at the big picture books on the huge table in the great living room. His father, Casimir, had been working among the rose bushes with the head gardener. Judge Freeman had been involved in one more conspiracy, which he firmly hoped would be the last.

It was Casimir who first interrupted Gloria in her search for David. Casimir had hardly believed that there were as many roses in all the world as there in the Stafford close. He could see his wife lying in a reclining chair in a sunny nook and it occurred to him that one of those roses would cheer her and serve as a bit of gallantry. So he plucked one. The gardener saw the deed, charged on him with a roar, and snatched the flower from him. The deep thorn bite he received in his thumb did not pacify him. He stood sucking his thumb and swearing when Pierpont stroled by.

Pierpont had lost his temper at the dairy because the head valet to the cows had not brushed their teeth to his satisfaction nor manured their hoofs to perfection. When the gardener explained that Casimir had dared to pluck one of the famous and priceless Pierpont roses which had never failed of honorable mention at the annual exhibition of the Garden club, Pierpont was more wroth than the head gardener.

Casimir quailed before the onslaught, and Gloria, drawn to the spot by the noisy voices, found him craven with confusion. She took his part at once, and when the gardener and her father explained the atrocity he had committed Gloria also turned on him: "In heaven's name, Casimir, what did you mean by taking the only rose my poor father has?"

"I did take it," Mees Gloria, for to geeve my poor wife. Better I should go away now, yes?"

"You took a rose to give to your wife, did you?" Gloria cried. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am it! Oh, I am it," Casimir protested.

"I should think you would be," Gloria stormed. "Taking one rose for your poor wife. The next time you want flowers for her you take as many as you can carry."

While her father and the gardener and Casimir gaped like dolts, she snipped off a dozen of the Pierpont roses with the gardener's own shears. She said them in Casimir's arms and said: "Maybe she won't care for the Pierpont roses. I don't think much of them, myself. So take her some of each of these varieties, and find which she likes best. Then if the gardener bothers you again, tell me and I'll snip his head off the same way and you can have his place."

She gave the gardener his shears, pushed Casimir out of the inclosure, and followed, turning to say: "Thank you, father."

Pierpont and the gardener looked at each other and both said, "Whew!"

Gloria went along to make sure that Casimir's wife received the flowers with no hint of their hazardous gathering. Then she went to the house to find David.

She was encountered by her aunt, the great Hortensia, with a bevy of other great ladies from the countryside.

"Give us tea, Gloria, for heaven's sake," said Hortensia, "and come listen to our scheme."

They dragged Gloria to the Japanese tea garden, whither the servants brought tea and all its accompaniments across the lawn. Aunt Hortensia gathered in Doctor Royce as well.

Aunt Hortensia explained that it was about time to "get up something." Each of the ladies had her pet charity which needed funds and everyone talked at the same time. Gloria's mind was too full of her own problems to feel much interest. She beckoned to Casimir and sent him with tea and cakes for his wife. When he came back with the china she piled up a little mid-afternoon banquet for himself.

He took it shyly, then stared at it, and shook his head and offered it back. Gloria asked why. He hesitated, then exclaimed: "In my Poland millions of my peoples are dying because they have not of bread. And should I to eat of cake? No, I could not, please!"

Gloria respected his feelings too much to force him to eat, but she turned to the committee and, claiming the floor, asked the house to listen to a delegate from Europe. She made Casimir speak. He was tongue-tied at first with embarrassment, but he warmed to his theme and told of the miseries of his beloved land, over



Gloria Flung Herself on Lois.

which vast armies had fought back and forth again and again till the wealthy and noble were living in cellars and eating husks and the poor were dying in herds.

When he had finished every eye was wet and every heart ached for Poland. When Gloria proposed a mammoth lawn festival for Polish relief there was unanimous assent.

"We'll charge a fortune for a tea biscuit and bankrupt everybody that comes," said Gloria. "Then I'll take the money over to Poland myself to make sure that it falls into the right hands."

"And I'll go along with you," Doctor Royce spoke up, "to make sure that you don't fall into the wrong hands."

Everyone applauded the impudence, but Gloria answered it with one of her blackest looks. Doctor Royce was still under the ban. He had confessed too much and duped her too well to be forgiven in haste. But her rebuke was ignored in the excitement of the convention. A mammoth lawn festival for Polish relief; there was no dissent.

Now once more Gloria felt free to seek David. She found him, hiding, he said, till the women got away. She asked him to follow her. She had perfected her scheme for testing his innocence or his guilt.

David had not been present when the yachting expedition set forth to run down Trask, nor had he been present when Trask was brought in. David was thoroughbred enough to rule his own expressions and to pretend ignorance of Trask's existence. But Gloria felt sure that if she could bring the two men suddenly face to face one or the other would betray a guilty knowledge.

So she said to David: "Come with me. I've got a surprise for you."

David followed her up to the guest room where Trask had been installed. She led him to the door, knocked, opened the door, and bade David enter. A screen stood before the bed and she drew it aside quickly, keeping her eyes on David. She saw surprise in his face, but not of the sort she expected. His surprise was blank wonder. She turned to see how Trask took the confrontation. Trask was not there. The bed was empty.

Gloria ran to find the nurse. She met her just coming in from a motor ride. She had taken her two hours of liberty, she said, leaving Nell to care for her father. She was stunned by the news of Trask's departure. He was too weak to rise and walk. It seemed fathomless that he could have been carried out without attracting the attention of a dozen servants.



"And I'll Go Along With You," Said Doctor Royce.

Gloria felt bewitched. She ran to seek Doctor Royce. David ran after her, asking: "What's it all about? What's the little surprise you had for me? It seems to have caught you first."

"Don't bother me," was all Gloria would say.

David seemed so amused by her dismay that she began to suspect him of kidnapping his confederate. But she dared not accuse him lest, if he were innocent, she would reveal to him more of Lois' guilt than she felt it her right to divulge.

She stood off David and hurried on to find Doctor Royce. She met Judge Freeman on the lawn, and told him what had happened. He expressed surprise, but when she had left him she began to feel dissatisfied with the sincerity of his amazement. But she could not pause to investigate further. When at last she found Royce, she forgot that he was in her black book still. It had been her habit for so many years to run to him with her problems that she ran to him now, and, laying her hands on his arm, cried:

"Oh, Stephen, Stephen, they've stolen Trask! I've lost him again and I don't know what to do."

"Stolen Trask!" Royce exclaimed. "It's impossible."

"Of course, it's impossible," said Gloria, "but it's true, too."

Royce set out to pick up what trace there might be of him. Gloria tagged along. Royce asked every servant he met where he had been. Several of them had been on the lawn serving tea. Judge Freeman had sent others on various errands. The cook and her crew had been busy providing for Aunt Hortensia's mob. Royce called for his own chauffeur. He had been in the kitchen, he confessed, as a guest at a tea party below stairs.

Judge Freeman was not to be found. As a matter of fact he was the principal offender. After he left Gloria he had wandered about in a deep and gloomy meditation. He was convinced that Gloria, with her impulsive and unmanageable temper, was set upon unraveling every knot in the tangle. He was sure that her inexperience with the world would keep her from foreseeing the consequences and that she would compel a complete revelation. This would end only in a public scandal, an enormous and irretrievable disaster.

David would be put on trial for his life and Trask would turn state's evidence against him to save his own life. David would perhaps be sentenced to death, or, if he escaped that, he would escape it in some pretense of insanity, with all the aftermath of endless serial scandals. In any case, Lois would be disgraced before the world, and if David's wealth could bribe an acquittal, it would purchase a divorce.

Another consequence would be that the judge himself would be impeached or forced to a resignation under fire, with his ermine dishonored. It is only fair to say that the judge's fears for his own suffering had less weight with him than his fears for the wreck of his daughter's life and of David's. He loved David as if he were his own son. He had a deep affection for Pierpont, and he cherished a great fondness for Gloria. He respected even the motives that were so perilous to herself as well as all the others.

He wandered disconsolately about the lonelier portions of the Stafford demesne and found himself at the outer gate. There he chanced to see the bargeman, Jed, come up the road. Jed asked if he knew where the Stafford place was. Judge Freeman told him that it was before him. Jed asked if a badly hurt man had been taken in there with his daughter. The judge nodded and asked what he knew of the pair.

Jed said he didn't know much except that the old man's daughter was his girl and going to marry him some day and he was afraid she was in trouble. So he had left the barge to hurry back and see if he could be of some use.

The judge questioned him cautiously and finally proposed that the best thing to do would be to get the old man out of the hands of the Staffords, who meant him no good. Jed seized on the suggestion hungrily and the judge offered his co-operation. He led Jed by a little frequented path to the rear of

the house and bade him wait. He went in and sent Nell out to speak to Jed and make sure that she wanted to escape with him. Nell assured him that she did. The beauty of the home oppressed her.

While Nell was talking with Jed Judge Freeman was ordering his own chauffeur to bring the car up to a corner of the driveway shielded from the house by a clump of ancient rhododendrons as large as trees. Then the judge, surprised at his own craftiness and bringing into play all the lore he had acquired from hearing thieves' confessions, set about the burglarious art of clearing the house. Most of the servants had been impressed into the serving of wholesale tea at Aunt Hortensia's convention. The rest Judge Freeman sent on various errands with messages to distant laborers on the grounds.

When the coast, or at least the stairway, was clear, he called in his chauffeur and Jed. They hurried up to Trask's room and, lifting him in his sheets, hurried out into the hall and down the stairs with him. The old man suffered agonies from the jolts and jars, but he smothered his groans somewhat. The judge went ahead as a scout and warned off one maid who ran in for Aunt Hortensia's parasol and a man who hurried back for a social register of the county to be used in making up a committee list.

Thus Trask was, as the saying is, spirited away without being seen by anyone except his abductors. The chauffeur ran his car from the grounds by the tradesmen's entrance and Judge Freeman, lingering, saw the cloud of dust the machine raised as it dashed north. He remained to keep watch and to do what he could turn pursuit in the wrong direction.

He felt dispirited by the pallor of Trask and by his extreme exhaustion. He was afraid that the old man would not last long. He hated himself for the thought, but he could not dismiss the belief that it would solve all problems if the wretch would pass away in silence. If he spoke he might condemn himself to death in the chair and take David with him.

Judge Freeman abhorred his own deed and regretted that he could not punish himself publicly as severely as he would have punished another judge who violated his honor so. But he



"I've Got a Surprise for You."

had been a father before he became a judge, and the parental instinct overruled the legal obligation. He understood as never before the almost irresistible impulses that compel men toward criminal acts, and he wondered which it were better to do, resign his post as judge of other men or remain on the bench and administer mercy more freely than he had been wont to do.

Meanwhile he smiled, though dimly, to think that his old head had outwitted the young wits of Gloria. He saw how disturbed she was by the escape of her captive, but he felt no more remorse than one feels who takes a sharp knife away from a child lest it wound itself as well as others.

Gloria was frantic. She was still surrounded by hostile friends who thwarted every effort she made to learn the truths that were all important to her peace of heart.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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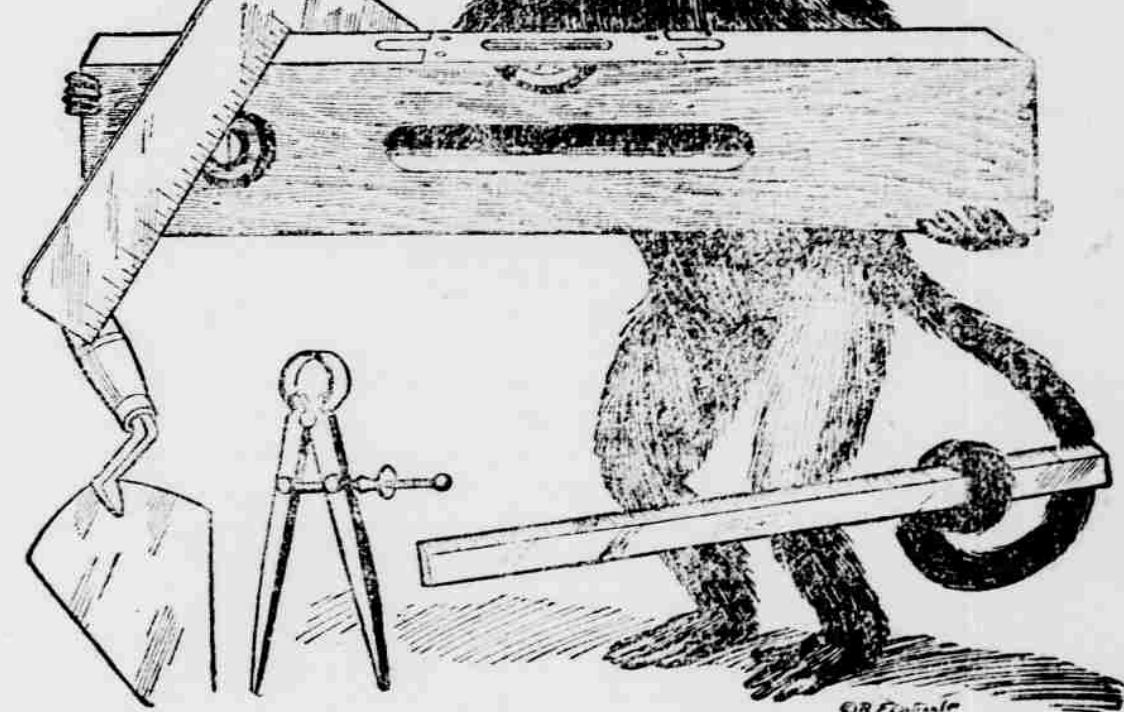


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